

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: University of Mississippi

Application ID: 14ES155855

Program Name: University of Mississippi (UM) College Corps

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

The applicant clearly demonstrates the need for the proposed range of interventions for children and families in these economically disadvantaged areas of Mississippi.

The applicant presents a compelling argument for the implementation of dedicated AmeriCorps members to carry the objectives of the nonprofit programs providing services.

The applicant provides results from focus groups and interviews with affiliated nonprofits as evidence to support the community needs

The applicant provides specific, relevant statistical data that show the need to have more Members to support the economically disadvantaged children and their families, such as the high number of economically disadvantaged children who are not prepared for kindergarten and families who face health problems due to hunger.

The applicant provides a compelling argument that there is a need to retain college volunteers, so consistent and high quality services can be provided to the communities.

The applicant effectively articulates the need to improve literacy in the target areas to be served and provides specific data showing the gap between national and state data and/or target areas and state data referring to: high poverty levels, reduced educational opportunities for young children in part because kindergarten is not required in the state of Mississippi, high levels of food insecurity, and high unemployment rates.

The applicant clearly defined the four interventions and aligned the inputs and activities to each individual program creating a logical flow and well-defined short-term/medium-term outcomes.

The applicant also provided a strong and compelling description of how the service requirements of the AmeriCorps

members would allow the participating nonprofits to maintain continuity of benefits and services to the children and families.

Training for Members is comprehensive and includes participation in training specific to the intervention, as offered by the participating non-profit to ensure that AmeriCorps members are highly prepared and capable to carry out activities.

The applicant cited a total of 12 studies that are relevant to the proposed program. These studies support the applicant's argument of the importance of the service their Members will provide, such as after-school tutoring and summer learning opportunities.

The applicant provided clear information about what their Members plan to do and the impact of their activities, such as the amount of times their Members will dedicate to serve the communities.

The applicant provides solid evidence from focus groups and surveys of leaders of their organizations that College Corps members are strengthening after-school tutoring and feeding programs.

The applicant presents a persuasive evidence-base that supports causal conclusions for the specific program proposed by the applicant with the highest level of confidence.

The applicant describes progress in achieving program results, national performance measures, and enrollment targets of 100% in this past year. The applicant exceeded their stated performance in the previous years. For example, the applicant tutored more children and provided food and support to more children and families. This indicates the dedication of their Members and organization of the programs.

The applicant has been successful in achieving past performance measures, improving over time. In 2012-2013 the applicant met or exceeded all performance measures in their primary focus area of education and filled 100% of its 60 slots for AmeriCorps members

Weaknesses:

The applicant states that the unemployment rates are high in the three counties they serve. However, the applicant did not mention what the national unemployment rate is.

The applicant indicates that it is difficult to retain college students to serve as volunteers. However, data related to the retention rate of college volunteers are missing.

Although the applicant related statewide data on educational achievement, no data is provided specific to the target schools where the tutoring services will be carried.

It was difficult to determine if the outcomes in the Logic Model were fully aligned to the specific activities.

The applicant cited 12 studies but did not include any result data and information about the methodology. This lack of information makes it difficult to assess the impact of the programs in the communities they served.

The applicant indicates that the reading performance of the students in Mississippi is a serious concern. However, the applicant does not mention if the after-school tutoring and summer program will solve the reading gap problem.

The applicant indicates that many economically disadvantaged children and families face hunger and health problems. However, the applicant does not mention how providing food assistance will solve these problems in the long term.

Limited data and evidence is presented to fully support past performance statements offered by the applicant.

The data provided suggests achievement of program implementation outcomes (e.g., filling slots), not necessarily outcomes to participants.

Although the applicant mentions that they tutored more children and these children had made improvements, no further information is provided related to the types of improvements the children had made and if these improvements closed the reading gap.

Although the applicant related that pre/post testing was performed and that more than 140 children who received tutoring demonstrated improvement at the end of the year, it is unclear what these improvements were or if these improvements were statistically significant.